

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF EDUCATION POLICY  
ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Illinois Statewide Superintendents Survey: 2002  
Analysis and Findings:

Section I

EVALUATION OF SUPERINTENDENTS AND PRINCIPALS

July, 2004

Richard Wiggall, Ed D  
Assistant Professor  
Northern Arizona University

CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF EDUCATION POLICY  
ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Illinois Statewide Superintendents Survey: 2002  
Analysis and Findings

Richard Wiggall, Ed D  
Northern Arizona University

EVALUATION OF SUPERINTENDENTS AND PRINCIPALS

**INTRODUCTION**

(Author's note: the results of the Illinois Statewide Superintendent's Survey for 2002 are summarized in two documents, one covering evaluation of administrative personnel the other addressing school finance. The Introduction of these two papers is the same because it contains material describing of demographics of the respondents to a single survey.)

In 2002, a survey was sent to every local educational agency's superintendent. After a period of four weeks, a follow-up survey was sent to the superintendents who had not responded. The respondents to the survey totaled 505 of a possible 894. The intent of this survey was to develop a perspective of local school district superintendents.

A similar process was followed in 2000, although the content of the survey addressed different topics. This series of surveys is not intended to develop a longitudinal data base but rather a "snapshot" of perspectives at a point in time. The results of the 2000 survey can be found on the website of the Center for the Study of Education Policy, Illinois State University.

When comparing the number of responses from 2000 and 2002 (See Tables 1 and 2) it is noted that there were 98 fewer responses in 2002. The authors believe this is due to the structure of the survey and not to a lack of interest. The survey was constructed in four parts, as follows: Part I dealing with aspects of performance evaluation for superintendents and principals; Parts II and III to develop an estimate of Illinois' future needs for teachers; Part IV to solicit information regarding state and local finance. The problem appeared to have occurred with Parts II and III,

Table 1. Responses by type of district and percentage response 2002			
	Number Responding	State Total	Percent Response
Unit (K-12)	267	405	65.%
High School (9-12)	50	104	48%
Elementary (K-8)	182	385	47%
Total	505*	894	56%*

\* 6 responses did not indicate type of district

feedback indicated too much detail was requested. Those sections either were not returned or were inconsistent. Therefore, no attempt was made to analyze the data from those sections. There were sufficient comments from those who did respond to these sections to cause the author to believe that some chose not return the entire questionnaire rather than delete the troublesome sections. Thus, there are fewer respondents to the 2002 survey. The representation of respondents, from the three types of school districts in Illinois, does not differ statistically therefore is not a concern when considering the responses in the aggregate.

Table 2. Responses by type of district and percentage response 2000			
	Number Responding	State Total	Percent Response
Unit (K-12)	310	408	76%
High School (9-12)	67	104	64%
Elementary (K-8)	226	385	59%
Total	603*	897	70%*

\*21 responses did not indicate type of district

Table 3 demonstrates three aspects of the respondents. First, the number of years the respondents have been in education; second, the number years as a superintendent and third, the length of time the current position as a superintendent has been held.

Table 3. Indicators of experience for responding superintendents 2002			
Year Ranges	Years in Education	Years as Superintendent	Years in Current Position
0 to 5	0	166	282
6 to 10	8	138	160
11 to 15	10	84	42
16 to 20	28	61	16
21 to 25	77	35	3
26 to 30	142	14	1
31 to 35	198	1	0
36 or more	37	2	0
Average	28.86	9.87	5.68

If the responses from the 2000 survey are compared with the 2002 responses interesting aspects of the superintendents' position emerge. It was suggested in the reports of the 2000 survey, given the length of service of the respondents, there would be an increasing demand for superintendents. The larger percentage of persons with less than ten years as a superintendent in 2002 demonstrates how rapidly this change is taking place.

Table 4. Comparison of experience factors for respondents to the 2000 and 2002 surveys		
	2000 survey	2002 survey
Less than ten years as superintendent	56.7%	88%
More than 20 years in education	91%	91%
More than 30 years in education	42%	47%
More than 6 years in current position	51%	66%

When examining the respondents for educational experience, there is an increase in the number of superintendents with more than 30 years in the field of education and more than 6 years in their current position as superintendent.

### Evaluation of Superintendents and Principals

A similar set of questions was posed to the superintendents surveyed regarding their own evaluation by boards of education and their (the superintendent's) evaluation of the principals in their school districts. For the purpose of analysis the responses to the questions were divided into three sections for superintendents and three sections for principals. These divisions were labeled as listed below.

1. *structure* of the evaluation: to examine legal or contractual requirements and comfort with the evaluator.

2. *process* of the evaluation: to review frequency of evaluation, use of instruments and determination of merit pay.
3. *criteria* of evaluation: a categorization what is utilized by the evaluator to determine various aspects of performance.

### Structure of Evaluation of the Superintendent

When examining the structure of evaluation for superintendents nearly 90% have a clause in their contract which addresses the need for formal evaluation (Table 5). Three quarters of the superintendents responding agreed that the board would be fair and unbiased in their appraisal of the superintendent's performance. Only 10% disagreed that the board would be able to be fair and unbiased while 14% responded neutral to this question. If neutrality is interpreted as uncertainty, 25% of the superintendents responding either disagreed or were uncertain that their employing board would be fair or unbiased in their appraisal.

The great majority (81%) of boards use either an evaluation instrument or some type of predetermined process to evaluate the performance of their superintendent. While there was no cross match between the questions there is likely a relationship between the high number of superintendents who are comfortable that the board will be fair and unbiased in their appraisal and the fact that boards utilize instruments or a predetermined process in their approach to evaluation.

Table 5. Structure of the Superintendent's Evaluation Questions 1, 5 and 7					
Question	Responses				
1. There is a clause in the superintendent's contract that addresses formal evaluation procedures.	YES: 89.6%			NO: 10.4%	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5. There is a degree of comfort that the board's evaluation of the superintendent will be fair and unbiased.	27.3%	47.4%	14.3%	8.2%	2.8%
7. There is an instrument or predetermined process used in the evaluation of the superintendent.	44.4%	36.9%	4.6%	10.6%	3.6%

### Process of Evaluation of the Superintendent

In Table 6 we see that the usual pattern for evaluation of the superintendent is that it occurs annually. Nearly 90% of the respondents indicated this pattern. Approximately 8% of superintendent's evaluations occur less than annually while 3% occur more often than annually. We did not ask the question regarding the length of a superintendent's contract this information could tie in directly to the evaluation process. In 1999 the legislature established that a superintendent's contract could be for up to a period of five years (up from the previous three year limitation). However, in order to exceed three years the superintendent's contract had to include performance factors and appraisal. Future surveys should explore the relationship of

superintendent's duration of employment and contracts containing a clause applicable to evaluation. Although, there may be some indication in the response to the question that one of the products of the evaluation process is a determination of merit pay. Forty percent of the respondents agreed that as a part of the process the board determines merit pay. However, an even larger percentage of respondents (45%) indicated that merit pay was not included.

Table 6. Process of the Superintendent's Evaluation: Questions 2 and 6					
Question	Responses				
2. The board performs a formal evaluation of the superintendent:	Annually: 88.8%			More Often: 2.9%	Less Often: 8.3%
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6. The board, as a part of the evaluation process, determines merit pay for the superintendent's performance.	12.6%	27.3%	15%	26.5%	18.6%

### Criteria for Evaluation of the Superintendent

An element to be explored in this survey was the consideration being given to the Illinois Standards for School Administrators in appraisal of school administration. (These Standards may be found on the Illinois State Board of Education's web site and for the sake of brevity are not included in this paper). When queried whether the Board of Education was knowledgeable regarding the Standards only 28% agreed 25 % were neutral and 47 % disagreed. Typical of the comments registered by the respondents attributable to this question was "only because I educate them". Due to such a small percentage of board members being knowledgeable of the Standards for Illinois School Administrators it is not surprising that, as reported, not much consideration is given to the Standards in the superintendent's evaluation. The respondents agreed that Standards were considered 23% of the time, 55% disagreed and 22% were neutral. See Table 7.

If not administrators' Standards, what do boards consider in superintendent's evaluation? A list of twenty possible items was presented, the respondents were asked to select the five which they felt were used by boards in their evaluation. There was not a request to rank the five in order so the items marked were tabulated but not weighted. Table 7 contains the top ten items that were indicated and the percentage of respondents that marked the item. The most frequently indicated item (80%) was "management of the financial affairs of the district". Interestingly, a companion item, "maintaining a balanced budget" was marked by only 19% of the respondents. The last item included from these ten was "maintaining a safe environment for students", also indicated by 19% of the respondents.

Table 7. Criterion of the Superintendent's Evaluation: Questions 3,4 and 10					
Questions	Responses				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. The board is knowledgeable in the Standards for Illinois School Administrators.	4.2%	23.7%	25.5%	40.1%	6.6%
4. The board considers the Illinois Standards for School Administrators in the evaluation of the superintendent.	3.6%	19.2%	22.4%	43.4%	11.4%
10. Following is a list of items, select five which represent the criteria the board uses in the evaluation of the superintendent. ( <i>Author's note: only the top ten are presented</i> )	80.4% Management of the financial affairs of the district. 64.7% Relationship with the Board as a whole. 54.7% Maintaining the quality of the education program. 49% Developing and implementing long term plans for the district. 42.1% Relationship with employees. 36.2% Relationship with the community at large. 20.5% Developing short term plans in reaction to district problems/crisis situations. 20.5% Student performance measured by ISAT/PSE 19.4% Maintaining a balanced budget. 18.9% Maintaining a safe environment for students.				

### Structure of Evaluation of the Principal

Examining the structure of principal evaluation, as reported by responding superintendents, a majority of principals (68%) have an item in their contracts addressing evaluation. In some instances (23%) principals have a contract but no contractual language to cover the evaluation process while nearly 9% do not have a contract while serving as a principal making the question moot. See Table 8.

Table 8. Structure of Principal's Evaluation Process Questions 1 and 8					
Question	Responses				
1. There is a clause in the principal's contract that addresses formal evaluation procedures.	YES: 68.4%* *no individual or group contract 8.5%			NO: 23.0 %*	
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7. There is an instrument or predetermined process used in the evaluation of the principal.	53.9%	35.9%	3.3%	6.3%	0.7%
8. There is a degree of comfort that the superintendent's evaluation of the principal will be fair and unbiased.	33.6%	41.9%	15.7%	5.5%	3.2%

When superintendents evaluate principals, 90% report that they use a predetermined process or instrument while 7% do not. Three percent were neutral in their response. Are principals comfortable that the superintendent will be fair and unbiased in their appraisal of principals? Almost 77% of the superintendents agree that they are, with 9% disagreeing. Sixteen percent remain neutral about how they think principals see them as an evaluator.

### Process of Evaluation of the Principal

The annual pattern of evaluation that was apparent with superintendents also appears with principals as 87% of the responding superintendents indicated. About 6% were evaluated more often than annually and 7% less often. In the evaluation process the superintendent uses some predetermined criteria (95%) and makes the principal aware of the criteria (96%) prior to beginning the evaluation process. See Table 9.

Table 9. Process of the Principal's Evaluation: Questions 2, 5,6 and 9					
Question	Responses				
2. The superintendent performs a formal evaluation of the principal:	Annually: 87.0%			More Often: 6.1%	Less Often: 6.9%
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5. The superintendent uses some predetermined criteria for the principal's evaluation.	45.6%	49.0%	3.7%	1.7%	0.0%
6. The superintendent makes the principal aware of the criteria to be used in the principal evaluation prior to the actual evaluation.	55.6%	39.8%	3.3%	1.3%	0.0%
9. Merit pay is a byproduct of the evaluation process for principal's	12.5%	20.1%	20.6%	26.5%	20.4%

Merit pay, as a byproduct of evaluation, for the principal occurs slightly less often than for superintendents, 33% for principals as opposed to 39% for superintendents. The responding superintendents disagreeing with merit pay for principals as an outcome of evaluation was almost identical with those disagreeing with merit pay as an outcome for superintendents (46% in the case of principals and 45% for superintendents). The difference in the responses agreeing with merit pay as an outcome appears to have moved to the neutral column as opposed to disagreeing when comparing the responses regarding superintendents, principals and merit pay.

### Criteria for Evaluation of the Principal

As in the evaluation of superintendents, this survey queried superintendents regarding their knowledge of the Illinois Standards for School Administrators, obtaining quite different results. The responding superintendents largely agreed (92%) they were knowledgeable of the standards. While not as large a percentage, 76% indicated that they took the Standards into consideration in the evaluation process. See Table 10.

In addition to the Illinois Standards for School Administrators, superintendents were asked to identify five items, from a list of twenty, as criteria they used when evaluating principals. Again, this was not a request to rank, the items represented are from a frequency of indicated. The

number one item selected by superintendents was “Instructional leadership” (79%). The second most frequently selected item (56%) was “Relationship with employees in the building”. The last item, of the ten presented, “Student scores measured by ISAT/PSE”, was selected by only 27% of the respondents.

Table 10. Criterion for the Principal’s Evaluation: Questions 3,4 and 10					
Questions	Responses				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3. The superintendent is knowledgeable in the Standards for Illinois School Administrators.	42.1%	49.2%	3.5%	4.8%	0.4%
4. The superintendent considers the Illinois Standards for School Administrators in the evaluation of the superintendent.	26.2%	49.4%	14.5%	8.9%	1.1%
10. Following is a list of items, select five which represent the criteria the superintendent uses in the evaluation of the principal. ( <i>Author’s note: only the top ten are presented</i> )	78.9% Instructional leadership. 55.5% Relationship with employees in the building. 50.6% Implementation of the Instructional Improvement Plan. 49.9% Maintaining a safe environment for students. 42.0% Development of the School Improvement Plan. 36.6% Relationship with the parent community. 32.7% Student discipline. 30.2% Evaluation of teachers. 28.8% Relationship with students. 26.8% Student performance measured by ISAT/PSE.				

## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

### Superintendents

If we follow the axiom: “evaluation is about what we value and promote”, then the responses provided to this survey provide some insight into what superintendents see as what boards of education value in their performance. Following is an overview of the structure and process of performance appraisal of superintendents:

- Nine out of ten superintendents have contracts which contain a clause governing their evaluation.
- Three quarters of superintendents agree that they will receive a fair and unbiased evaluation from their employing board.
- Nine out of ten boards evaluate the superintendent annually.
- Eight out of ten boards use an instrument or predetermined process.
- Only four out of ten boards use evaluation to determine performance pay for superintendents.

This survey provided a very strong indication that boards of education do not have knowledge regarding the Illinois Standards for School Administrators. Only one quarter of the responding superintendents felt that their board had a working knowledge of the Standards. If Standards are



to become part of the lexicon of board members then both superintendents and board organizations need to step up the process of familiarizing board members with these Standards and the purpose of these Standards.

What do boards value in a superintendent's performance? Eight out of ten superintendents responded "Managing the financial affairs of the district". The other financially related item in the list was "Maintaining a balanced budget" which only one in five superintendents felt that was a criterion for board evaluation. This could demonstrate one of two things. Either maintaining a balanced budget isn't a problem for most Illinois school districts or a balanced budget isn't highly prized by Boards of Education. The second most frequently marked item (65% of responding superintendents) was "Relationship with the Board as a whole". It should not be a surprise that superintendents perceive as the two most important aspects of their performance is managing the financial affairs of the district and maintaining their relationship with the Board of Education.

There are some surprises though given the nature of what is perceived as the job of the superintendent.

- Slightly over half saw maintaining the quality of the education program as an expectation.
- Less than half of the respondents thought that long term planning was an expectation.
- Slightly over one third thought they were evaluated on their relationship with the community.
- Only one in five thought their evaluation addressed:
  1. Developing short term plan in reaction to district problems.
  2. Student performance measured by ISAT/PSE.
  3. Maintaining a safe environment for students.

Given the today's emphasis on student performance and student safety, it is difficult to understand why boards of education are not perceived as having higher expectations in these areas. Superintendents will make a priority in their job performance based on what they perceive is a priority in board expectations.

## **Principals**

In an age of accountability for what do superintendents hold principals accountable? Before addressing this question a contrast of how superintendents evaluate with how they are evaluated is presented. As a reminder, these are superintendents' responses related to their evaluation of principals. Below is an overview of the principals' structure and process with contrast to the same regarding superintendents:

- Twenty-two percent fewer principals have clauses in their contracts addressing evaluation (68% vs. 90%).
- The same percentage perception as superintendents regarding a fair and unbiased evaluation (75%).
- Nearly all superintendents use some predetermined criteria and share that criteria with the principal prior to evaluation (95%).
- Nearly all superintendents use some instrument or predetermined process in the evaluation of principals (95%).
- Thirty percent of the principals as opposed to forty percent of the superintendents have merit pay as a consideration in their evaluation.

When superintendents evaluate principals the most frequently occurring criterion is “Instructional leadership”, which occurs eight out of ten times. “Instructional leadership” for principals, like “Management of the financial affairs of the district” for superintendents, is an encompassing phrase lacking specificity. With superintendents we found that the specific phrase “Maintaining a balanced budget” fit only three out of ten superintendents. For principals, some companion phrases that may provide some specificity to “Instructional leadership” were:

- Development of the School Improvement Plan (42%).
- Implementation of the School Improvement Plan (51%).
- Student performance measured by ISAT/PSE. (27%)

These items were examined separately because they fit the State of Illinois’ prescribed process for improving schools. Yet half or less of the responding superintendents marked these as an item utilized in evaluating principals’ performance. As with the superintendents’ evaluation, where the State of Illinois test results were considered by 20% as one of the five primary items in their evaluation, superintendents considered State test results in their evaluation of principals about one fourth of the time. This is not a call for holding superintendents and principals accountable for student test scores but rather bringing attention to how these items are treated in evaluation. The other items, of which approximately half of the superintendents were in agreement, were “Relationships with employees in the building” (56%) and “Maintaining a safe environment for students” (50%).

The remaining items from the top ten responses to items considered in the evaluation of principals are:

- Relationship with parent community (37%).
- Student discipline (33%)
- Evaluation of teachers (30%)
- Relationship with students (29%)

Being a superintendent or a principal is a difficult job, particularly in the current environment of accountability. Boards of Education for the most part recognize this is true for superintendents and superintendents certainly recognize this is true for principals. Evaluation is usually considered as an opportunity to demonstrate support and provide direction. The author hopes this monogram has provided some insight into the evaluation of the individuals who hold these administrative positions.